

Translation and Semiotics in the 90s

1. Introduction¹

By definition translation is a semiotic activity. Starting with this simple observation I will proceed with an analysis of the relationship between translation and semiotics. The former as a discipline (*Translation Studies*) investigates the process and product of translating in context and the latter (*Semiotics*), the process of signification and interpretation.

My analysis will concentrate on the present, especially on the last ten years, a period in which the relationship between the two disciplines has intensified. The reason for this is partly that in the nineties Translation Studies (TS) has been paying more and more attention to various kinds of texts and the analysis of texts consisting of other semiotic systems beyond the linguistic one, that is multimedia translation, has been introduced. In such a context it is obvious that Semiotics has gained importance since it can count on models of analysis adaptable to any kind of text, where the term “text” is to be understood in its widest sense.

Although the relationship between TS and Semiotics seems inevitable, specific reference to the interconnection is still rare among scholars belonging to either discipline. The fact remains however that Semiotics is essential for translation and that translation has to be included as one of the principal semiosis activities. Nevertheless it should be added that the lack of co-operation between the two disciplines is linked to a certain kind of operative incompatibility. Although the principles of Semiotics are very relevant for any kind of translation theory, the discipline has not shown that it is able to account for translation viewed as *intercultural communication*. It has been Cultural Studies (CS) rather than Semiotics that has offered TS the parameters and categories it needed to develop this approach.

Here I will try to single out the nature of the relationship between the two disciplines by presenting their points of contact. First of all I shall deal with what the two disciplines presuppose theoretically concerning each other, and here I return to my initial statement that translation is by definition a semiotic activity. Secondly, I will present and discuss some concrete examples of texts and studies where translation uses Semiotics.²

Finally it should be pointed out that the encounter between Semiotics and TS is even more problematic given the internal contrasts and contradictions between the various schools of thought within the two disciplines.

2. Translation Studies: a semiotic view

2.1. The discipline of Translation Studies

It is difficult, if not impossible, to give a clear definition of what TS is and of what it deals with. We are dealing with a field of study that includes widely differing theoretical approaches but nevertheless it is possible, as Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere state, to speak about the establishment of TS as an autonomous discipline as a success story of the 1980s (1990). The discipline in their words, “brings together a variety of fields, including linguistics, literary study, history, anthropology, psychology and economics” (1990: xi). It is symptomatic that here, as elsewhere, semiotics is not mentioned. Thus a search for the presence of semiotics can be found reading between the lines of TS: the cultural turn that has taken place inside TS is also to be

considered a semiotic turn. When TS gave up its status as a sub-discipline of linguistics (or of any other discipline) this led to the introduction of factors that have to do with semiotics. It was accepted, in other words, that translation is subject to the same rules as any other cultural act, and therefore to semiosis, which means the rules of signification, interpretation and communication.

In this sense one can talk about a semiotic view that connects translation to extra linguistic, cultural and social phenomena, and to specific problems that have to do with the text analysis proposed by Semiotics (§ 2.5.). Actually, the analysis of translations nowadays locates the problem of translation in a perspective that takes into consideration the communicative function of the texts, the simulacre of a sender and a receiver present in the texts (i.e. enunciation), the production of signification and sense, the negotiation to which all texts are submitted, the problem of encyclopaedia as pre-established knowledge schemata.

2.1.1. The textual panorama

Once the existence of TS as an autonomous discipline that considers translation from a cultural-communicational point of view was consolidated, it became possible to go beyond traditional kinds of analysis and textual typologies. Although literary texts have occupied, and still occupy a privileged role, the discipline has been forced to recognize that the majority of translation activity takes place elsewhere, at least from a quantitative point of view: in mass-media (advertising, journalism), in television and in the cinema industry (dubbing, subtitling), in commerce and technology (handbooks, instructions, contracts) and in politics (international documents such as those in the EU). Thus TS can no longer ignore the existence of translation problems related to various genres and text-types. This is in fact one of the reasons for a stronger relationship between Translation and Semiotics, even if it is not explicit, and means that the translation scene has become more semiotic, without necessarily using semiotic analytical tools. The Nineties have seen an “explosion” of research into the translation of multimedia texts: international conferences, publications, university courses etc. In most cases the studies of the multimedia texts are not intersemiotic, but rather linguistic and deal with questions like dubbing, subtitling and voice over. Even if a semiotic method of analysis is arguably necessary, if not indispensable, for these kinds of transposition, any reference to Semiotics is rare. These studies still give the impression of not being able to treat a text, such as a film, as a unity that produces a global sense effect through the relationship between speech, visuals and sound (music, noise).

2.1.2. Cultural Studies (CS)

TS has received many stimuli from CS (Hall 1992, de Certeau 1990) in relation, for example, to studies on gender and sexuality, national identity and colonialism, ethnicity and race, popular culture and its audience, political identity, discourse and textuality etc. (Gossberg et. al. 1992: 1). CS can be considered an anti-discipline and does not have a clear disciplinary identity even if the links with Marxism, feminism, post structuralism and postmodernism are obvious. The same is true for the methodological aspect.

For cultural studies in fact has no distinct methodology, no unique statistical, ethnomethodological, or textual analysis to call its own. Its methodology, ambiguous from the beginning, could best be seen as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflective (Gossberg et. al. 1992: 2).

Since CS has no methodology, we can therefore establish that the only unifying element of the discipline is its being a critical practice of culture.

The interests of CS lie in popular culture, sub culture and, consequently, non prestigious texts, such as those of mass communications. The connection with TS, or better, the connection of TS

to CS is already obvious: it lies in the cultural turn itself, in the introduction of non-literary text types and text genres, in the interest towards non written and multimedia textual products, as for instance television programmes (soap operas, talk shows etc.), films, advertising and so on. The relationship established between the two disciplines is so strong that we are tempted to affirm that TS is becoming a sub discipline of CS and that this relationship can provide some explanations for what we have called the “missed opportunity” for co-operation between TS and semiotics.

My hypothesis is supported by the fact that many of the categories of analysis introduced in TS come directly from CS (which in turn is linked to post structuralism), categories like *ideology*, *gender*, *postcolonialism*, to mention only a few.

Further support for my hypothesis can be found in the history of the different disciplines inside academia. While semiotics has been, and still is, a discipline mainly practised in Europe, and particularly in France and Italy, CS, with roots in Britain, has expanded in Northern Europe and especially in the United States. It may, or may not be a coincidence that the leading translation scholars contributing to the present identity of the discipline, are European (but not French or Italian) or American. Cultural and linguistic contact has influenced the evolution of C.S. and Semiotics and the stronger link between CS and TS. American academia in particular has received more stimulus from post-structuralism and deconstruction than from semiotics as Venuti’s (1992, 1998) work clearly demonstrates.

CS and semiotics do, of course, have similar objects of interest — texts — but their approach and methodology are very different. While CS is close to areas like anthropology and sociology, semiotics rejects the social reality of texts in order to concentrate on their internal mechanisms of signification and interpretation, constructed by the texts themselves.

2.2 TS addresses semiotics

Traces of a semiotic approach or view in translation scholars’ texts³ can already be found in 1980.

The first step towards an examination of the process of translation must be to accept that although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to *semiotics* (Bassnett [1980] 1991:13).

Other scholars have recognised the importance of semiotics, although only a few go deeply into the problem. Among these few, are the contributors to the volume by Wolfram Wilss, *Semiotik und Übersetzen* (1980).⁴ Gideon Toury is one of the contributors to this volume and the research centre of which he is part at the University of Tel Aviv (the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics) is one of the most sensitive towards the semiotic approach of this period. The so called *Polysystem Theory* proposed by Toury and his colleague Itamar Even-Zohar has its roots in Russian formalism, taking inspiration, moreover, from another Russian, the semiotician Jurij Lotman, and is certainly to be defined as semiotically oriented. It is partly due to this approach that we can talk about a semiotic view and a semiotic consciousness in TS today.

2.2.1. Translation semiotics

One of the recent works that attempts to connect and reconcile semiotics and translation is that of Dinda L. Gorfée. In her book (1994), and in numerous articles she uses Charles S. Peirce’s semiotics adapting it to translation.⁵ She is convinced – and I partly share her conviction – that TS has not yet found a unified translation theory and that one could find a remedy for this situation

if translation, both as a process and as a product of this process, is seen as a phenomenon which, at least on an abstract level, may be dealt with more fruitfully in the framework of a general theory of signs than with research methods - semiotics or otherwise - which are language-based (1994: 11).

Gorlée proposes the use of one specific approach to semiotics, that of Peirce, since, unlike structural semiotics, verbal signs are not subsumed under non verbal ones: "Peirce gave equal epistemological status to verbal and non verbal signs and systems" (op. cit.: 12). Through a presentation of the principal aspects of Peirce's sign theory, Gorlée shows its relevance for translation theory, both through Peirce's explicit assignments where semiosis is explained through the concept of translation, and through the juxtaposition of translation and semiosis. In the same book Gorlée places Peirce and his supposed translation theory in relation to Wittgenstein, Jakobson and Benjamin. She takes Wittgenstein's linguistic games and connects them to semiosis, analyses Jakobson's use of Peirce in his proposal of a translation theory (1959) and finally, she maintains that "what Benjamin discussed in his messianic vision of translation may be identified with what Peirce called, long before him, semiosis" (op. cit.: 137).

The author makes only sporadic references to translation scholars and in my opinion her proposal is not an attempt to take part directly in the internal debate in TS. Since she does not analyse translations her proposal remains a theoretical one:

We should consider seriously the logical implications of semiosis as a paradigm for (sign)translation of which interlingual translation is only one ramification [and, on the other hand] that translation (in its manifold varieties, but concentrating on Jakobson's language-based distinction, with particular emphasis on interlingual translation) exemplifies in its turn semiosis (1994: 227).

Although recognizing the significant value of Gorlée's work, in particular as regards the *definition* of the translation phenomenon, at a more operative level I do not feel that the Peircean concept is sufficient and that the theory needs integration of a textual kind. I am thinking here about Umberto Eco's text semiotics, which is based on the principles established by Peirce and developed in order to become a model for text analysis, and about the text theory proposed by the other main semiotic approach, that of generative structuralism, which proposes the most articulated and refined model for text analysis, being it verbal, non verbal, syncretic etc.

3. *Semiotics*

Semiotics is a discipline, or rather a field of study that means the *Science of signs*, but that actually does not recognize the sign as its only object of study. Rather it considers, on the one hand the production and function of signs in the construction of meaning, and on the other, the interpretation of signs. In other words, the discipline deals with the mechanisms that take place in any kind of communication. Semiotics is different from other disciplines that study communication in the fact that it does not study one language only, such as the linguistic or pictorial one, but takes into consideration all languages – or semiotic systems – taking for granted that all of them are based upon a common principle, i.e. signification, communication and interpretation through signs. The principle of translatability between the different semiotic systems derives from this common basis. In spite of the radical differences between semiotic systems and in spite of their not being mutually *commensurable*, they are however comparable (Eco 1995a, Fabbri 1991).

Speaking about semiotics in the singular, as if it were a unified discipline, however, is dangerous, if not misleading.

[N]on esiste *una* semiotica, quanto, piuttosto, un campo (d'azione, di manovre, di finalità) semiotico, una *koiné* tenuta assieme da somiglianze e parentele, ma anche solcata da profonde diversità (Cavicchioli 1997: 8).

There are different schools with diverse and at times contrasting approaches, the two principal ones being (Anglo American) *Interpretative semiotics*, fundamentally based on the thought of Peirce and developed by Eco, and (French) *Generative semiotics* that was developed by Saussure, followed by Hjelmslev and Greimas.

Let us briefly summarize the fundamental theoretical aspects relevant for translation of these two approaches or schools, and then proceed with a presentation of other semioticians that have shown particular interest in the translation phenomenon.

3.1. Interpretative semiotics

Introducing this approach we can connect with what Gorlée maintained regarding translation as a kind of interpretation and explained by Peirce through the semiosis mechanism. Let us recall it in Eco's words.

Per interpretazione (o criterio di interpretanza) deve intendersi ciò che intendeva Peirce quando riconosceva che ogni *interpretante* (segno, ovvero espressione o sequenza di espressione che traduce una espressione precedente) non solo ritraduce l'oggetto immediato' o contenuto del segno, ma ne allarga la comprensione (1984: 51).

This transformation, and at the same time growth - a characteristic of any semiosis - represents very well the interpretation process that takes place in translation and actually describes, better than other descriptions, that kind of "equivalence in difference" – as Jakobson puts it (1959) - in the relationship between source and target text. Along the same lines, Eco, one of the leading semioticians developing Peirce's thought, states that the criterion for a sign to be a sign is that it can be interpreted. This concept is therefore the exact basis for the whole semiotic universe in which interpretation and translation take place. "Non c'è modo", Eco writes,

nel processo di *semiosi illimitata* che Peirce descrive e fonda, di stabilire il significato di una espressione, e cioè di interpretare quella espressione, se non *traducendola* in altri segni (appartengano essi o no allo stesso sistema semiotico) e in modo che l'interpretante non solo renda ragione dell'interpretato sotto qualche aspetto, ma dell'interpretato faccia conoscere qualcosa di più (1984: 108).

In this way we realize to what a great extent translation is part of the process of semiosis itself.

3.2. Generative semiotics

While interpretative semiotics is based on the principle of interpretation, turning it into the basic principle also for translation, generative semiotics is, on the other hand, interested in the mechanisms of the signification process.

Thus two texts, one of which is a translation of the other, can be compared on various grounds, including basic lexical choices, isotopies or sense levels, narrative structures,

and the relations between ‘voices’ (Author, Narrator, Character, Implicit Reader and so on) (Eco & Nergaard 1998: 219).

In other words, the aim is to identify the content units that the text constructs and the ways in which these units are organized and used to obtain a general sense effect (or a multiplicity of sense effects) that the reading might pick up intuitively. The “space” of mediation between the text (utterance) and the instance of production presupposed by the utterance itself – particularly significant when one speaks about translation – is identified in the enunciation. There is, therefore, no reference to the extratextual reality, neither to the circumstances of communication. We only have to do with the production traces and marks that the utterance presupposes. Although this rejection of pragmatic reality might seem a problem when dealing with translations, the concept of enunciation should resolve it. In fact it is through the simulacrum of enunciation that we can recognise the effects of reality.

3.3. Semiotics and translation in the Nineties

The Nineties saw greater attention paid to translation by Semioticians. One could almost say that translation has become one of the key words in present-day semiotics. This is especially the case for Umberto Eco’s chair of semiotics at the University of Bologna, Italy and the Course in Communication Science at the same university in general. As we will see further on Eco himself has in recent years written several essays on the subject, seminars have been organised, books published (a series edited by Eco and published by Bompiani), theses written and, symptomatically, the annual conference of the Italian Association for Semiotic Studies (AISS) was in 1992 completely devoted to translation. At the same university there are semioticians who follow the structural-generative approach, and also work on translation. I am thinking of Paolo Fabbri in particular, who recently underlined the central role of this specific subject (1998).

Così, dinanzi alla [...] questione dei modelli e della loro traducibilità, sembra che la semiotica abbia senz’altro molto lavoro da fare. Il problema è che, invece, gran parte della semiotica attuale appare, rispetto a questa esigenza, un po’ *soprappensiero*: specula troppo e produce pochi modelli traducibili tra diversi sistemi di segni (1998: 95).⁶

Recently Eco has written several texts on translation, most of them written from the point of view of a translator,⁷ and even more from that of a translated writer.⁸ These essays offer a lot of interesting suggestions, also in a semiotic sense, but here I will concentrate upon the more scientific ones, that is “Mentalese and Translation” (paper presented at the conference in 1992 mentioned earlier) (1995a) and “Theoretical-practical considerations on translation” included in an anthology on translation (1995b).

The first of the two essays can be connected to the conclusions reached by the author in his book on the *Search for the perfect language* (1993), the history of a utopia, as Eco himself writes, the utopia that dreams of a universal or perfect language without polysemy, without ambiguity and which describes the world “as it is”. The last incarnation of this dream is the search to find a “Mentalese”: such a language is obviously impossible, because if it did exist there would be no more communication or translation. It is the imperfection of language that makes it perfect explains Eco, and the solution to the “language confusion” is translation.

Il limite di una lingua universale veicolare è lo stesso delle lingue naturali su cui viene ricalcata: essa presuppone un principio di traducibilità (1993: 371).

In the second essay we find Eco's first indications on how his semiotic text theory can be used for translation. He (re)proposes the concept of fidelity stating that the concept

ha a che fare con la persuasione che la traduzione sia una delle forme dell'interpretazione (come il riassunto, la parafrasi, la valutazione critica, la lettura ad alta voce di un testo scritto) e che l'interpretazione debba sempre mirare, sia pure partendo dalla sensibilità e dalla cultura del lettore, a ritrovare non dico l'intenzione dell'autore, ma l'intenzione del testo, quello che il testo dice o suggerisce in rapporto alla lingua in cui è espresso e al contesto culturale in cui è nato (1995b: 123).

As we can see, Eco's concept of *intentio operis* can be used for translation theory purposes, and so can the concept of *model reader*. The text being a lazy machine, Eco says, it needs the reader's participation in order to be realised and become complete. But here we are not speaking about an empirical reader, but rather a model reader, that is a figure constructed by the text itself, that the empirical reader should try to incarnate in order to be able to interpret the text according to its intentions. Finally the concept of *Encyclopaedia*, as a repertory of our world knowledge has become important in Eco's semiotics, both in his theory of semantics as a sort of *rizoma*, and in his text theory. When interpreting a text we refer to its partial encyclopaedia trying to fill in all the "gaps". But when the same text has to be translated we recognise that the encyclopaedia presupposed by that text is not automatically reconstructable in the target text since "non si può presumere una Grammatica Universale che implichi anche una conoscenza del mondo, e pertanto tale grammatica non potrebbe costituire parametro sufficiente per la traduzione" (1995a: 25).

Fabbri, a semiotics scholar who has shown interest in translation on several occasions and who represents on this occasion the "other" semiotics, i.e. the structural-generative kind, also returns to Peirce. He actually states that Peirce, together with Lotman, has not been sufficiently discussed in connection with translation. Fabbri refers to Peirce's definitions of sign and semiosis, underlining the fact that there is not merely the relationship of one sign passing on to the other (interpretant), but that the meaning of a sign is the sign into which it has to be translated. Reinforcing the role of translation in all Peirce's semiotics, Fabbri concludes that it is precisely by starting from translation that it is possible to create an inferential capacity through signs (1998: 115-116).

Fabbri is moreover interested in introducing the question of *discursive translation*, since different discourses, within the same language, might also be thought of as texts in translation. Even if scientific, artistic and political discourses are not mutually commensurable, it does not mean that they are not inter-translatable. Actually, Wittgenstein's linguistic game states that we play different games, which in some measure are not commensurable, but Fabbri adds, "tradurre è il solo modo di rispondere col moto alla problematicità inerte dei giochi di linguaggio" (1995: 61). In order to talk about translation between different discursive organisations inside the same language Fabbri refers to the secondary modelling systems proposed by the Russian school, and in particular by Lotman. These discursive organisations have, Fabbri writes,

caratteristiche specifiche rispetto al sistema modellizzante primario. Jakobson fa riferimento alla possibilità, e alla difficoltà di tradurre all'interno della stessa lingua naturale (oppure all'interno dello stesso sistema iconico) questi sistemi modellizzanti secondari che chiamiamo teoria del discorso, e molti sostengono, non a torto, che senza la teoria del discorso, è difficile fare le traduzioni (1995: 60).

Here we have an example of how semiotics inevitably changes or moves the perspective from which we can analyse translation, but it is, I believe, a useful turning point for translation theory itself.

3.4. Roman Jakobson and Jurij Lotman

While semiotics (both interpretative and generative) is of fundamental importance for a general translation theory, one has to go to the works of the two Russian semioticians, Jakobson and Lotman, to find explicit theories. Actually these are the only two semiotic scholars that have shown a particular interest in translation. In his essay “Linguistic problems of translation” (1959) Jakobson proposes the triadic division of translation into intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic which are defined as three different kinds of interpretation:

Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language [...]. Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of some other language [...]. Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (1959: 233).

It is partly thanks to these statements that translation has been put on the semiotic “agenda”. Although the text is too attached to linguistic frames and needs some correction today, it is still of fundamental value.⁹

The other semiotic scholar who deserves more detailed presentation is Jurij Lotman. Although translation occupies a significant position in Lotman’s reflections, and despite the fact that his work is particularly adaptable to translation from a cultural point of view, he is not frequently quoted by the majority of translation scholars.¹⁰ Actually Lotman’s semiotics is a cultural semiotics (1972, 1985, 1993) and in such a perspective translation represents for him the space in which cultures meet, mediate, enter into dialogue, grow and “explode”. In a text dated 1985, Lotman conceived in the concept of *semiosphere* the whole semiotic space “outside which the existence of semiosis is impossible” (1985: 58). Culture can be conceived as a semiosphere that translates and translates itself in the meeting with other semiospheres, other “semiotic personalities”. That is because the semiosphere in a certain sense is closed, and this closure is revealed by the fact that

essa non può avere rapporti con testi che le sono estranei da un punto di vista semiotico o con non testi. Perché essi acquistino realtà per la semiosfera, è necessario tradurli in una delle lingue del suo spazio interno o semiotizzare i fatti non semiotici (1985: 59).

[suggerisco l'uso della versione italiana dato che la versione inglese è una traduzione di una traduzione (presumo) - Chris]

Regarding the closure, Lotman goes on to specify that “the border [of the semiotic space] is a bilingualistic mechanism, that translates external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere, and vice versa” (1985: 60, my translation).¹¹

From these few claims it is possible to notice the particular importance of Lotman’s discourse for a culture oriented translation theory. His statements become even more stimulating when he speaks about translation as a space in which the explosion of cultures takes place. Actually the author maintains that cultures explode when the untranslatable becomes translatable.

Ma le correlazioni del traducibile e dell'intraducibile sono a tal punto complesse che vengono a formarsi possibilità di uno sfondamento nello spazio oltre i confini. Svolgono questa funzione anche i momenti di esplosione, che possono creare come delle finestre nello strato semiotico. Così il mondo della semiosi non è fatalmente chiuso in sé: esso forma una struttura complessa che continuamente “gioca” con lo spazio che gli è esterno, ora incorporandolo in sé, ora espellendo in esso propri elementi già utilizzati e che hanno perduto l'attività semiotica (1993: 38).

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3.5. Text semiotics

For semiotic text analysis it is fundamental that the analysis start from an immanent perspective and not from what precedes or follows to it. One speaks about the “putting into discourse” of the text, about a reader model and an author model as internal artifices of the text itself, about the text's isotopies and so on: all elements that are immanent in the text. It is this that, in one sense, fortifies textual theory, but, in another, from the translational point of view is also its weak side. How can we explain the internal transformations which take place in a text during the translation process without referring to external transformations, i.e. the spatio-temporal transformation which implies both linguistic and cultural transformations? The answer supplied by semiotics is that, since it is neither sociologically nor anthropologically oriented it can only deal with what the text itself expresses, remembering, however, that what the text expresses can obviously supply us with information about the world of which it is part, but the opposite is not true. We do not turn to society for explanations on how a text is written, interpreted or translated. In semiotics as in TS interest in non literary (e.g. mass media) texts makes this exclusion of the socio-cultural context problematic and, as Maria Pia Pozzato (1998) states: the most frequent criticism of semiotics is that it does not “bite on” reality, especially that of communicative facts. This criticism, Pozzato continues, is also present within semiotics itself:

quella interpretativa si preoccupa infatti di sostituire ai dizionari le semantiche a istruzione (Eco 1984 e 1990); quella strutturale, invoca le sue ascendenze antropologiche e vuole essere una teoria *adeguata* dell'immaginario e delle culture umane (Floch 1994), riprendendo anche il concetto wittgensteiniano di “forma di vita” (Fontanille ed. 1993) (Pozzato 1998: 197).

Thus it appears that there is a stronger trend towards reality in contemporary semiotics, though still in contrast with sociology. With reference to media communication one could say that while sociology studies media communication on the basis of previously established social categories, semiotics takes the media text as its starting point and posits hypotheses on socio-cultural value structures and categories. In this we also have an illustration of the link between TS and CS. For example let us consider a category such as ideology and how it has become fundamental in TS; if it had been introduced into semiotics it would have been seen in terms of value structures. Beside these very relevant problems in contemporary semiotics, we should recall the difference between the two approaches where semiotic textual analysis is concerned. The interpretative approach has formulated the idea of the co-operative reader in text interpretation (Eco 1979, 1990), while the generative approach studies the structures determining the generation of sense (Greimas 1970, 1983).

4. Intersemiotic translation

Just as the question of enunciation has become increasingly important to generative textual semiotics, the same is true for the semiotics of translation. The idea is that when analysing a text and reconstructing its enunciative requirements one can:

vedere che tipo di interpretazioni e di distorsioni il testo rende possibili, quali simulacri dell'enunciatore (e dell'enunciatario) esso costruisce al suo interno, quali ipotesi di autore e di lettore esso propone e quelli che sono, poi, gli interlocutori empirici della comunicazione (Fabbri 1998: 114).

We should recall here that a text can be constituted by any system (or systems) of signs. This means that the enunciation is identified equally in an audiovisual, pictorial or musical text, and so on.

Before going further into this question, I shall attempt a short “archaeological” survey of the very idea of translation in different semiotic systems. Clearly I am referring here Jakobson’s tripartite division of translation posited in his 1959 essay. While Jakobson’s point of departure is natural verbal language (all three types of translation presuppose the presence of linguistic signs), contemporary semiotics does not recognise the primary nature of natural language since this discipline analyses any possible system of meaning or communication process, whatever expressive means is used.

At this stage we can refer to the translation of *discourses*, expressed by different semiotic systems, when discourse is conceived as “luogo dove non si ritrovano più segni isolabili astrattamente ma *situazioni comunicative concrete inscritte entro testi concreti*” (Marrone 1998: 125). Thus semiotics, owing to its very nature examines intra- and intersemiotic, and interdiscursive translation, allowing us to consider the problem of translation from a more global and at the same time more comprehensive point of view. This does not mean, however that everything becomes translation. In any case we are dealing with transpositions in which the translation depends on and is equivalent to the text to be translated. Nevertheless problems of definition and delimitation arise: such as what is a translation? How can translation be defined? What is the difference between interpretation and translation? Semiotics like TS, does not supply an unambiguous answer to these questions and one is left with the impression that the best answers are supplied *ad hoc* in relation to the analysis of concrete translational situations, with all their obvious limitations.

Eco suggests in the first instance that we conceive translation as a subspecies of interpretation: “La tematica della traduzione diventa dunque una specie del genere Interpretazione ed è soggetto alla logica dell’abduzione” (1995a: 28). All translations, then, are interpretations, but all interpretations are not translations.

As we mentioned above, the problem of definition and even more that of delimitation becomes more acute when we include categories like intersemiotic and discursive translation. As a comment on, and supplement to, but also as a critique of Jakobson’s tripartite division, Eco posits a scheme beginning with the initial definition of translation as interpretation operating with an initial distinction between intra- and intersemiotic translations. In the intrasemiotic category we have a further division between natural and other types language and under natural languages we find two items in Jakobson’s classification: intra- and interlingual translation. Under the intersemiotic category on the other hand, we find the tripartite division into parasynonymy, performance and transposition or adaptation.¹²

If a classification of this kind, which is clearly more refined than that of Jakobson, helps us to place and distinguish different kinds of translation, the question arises however whether it is really possible to operate with a scheme in which adaptations (from book to film) are always

assigned *a priori* to the same position in the scheme. My impression is that only the specific analysis of transposition can establish what subcategory of interpretation is involved. The result of semantic analysis (the forms of content) could lead us to place an interlingual translation closer to the category of adaptations for example, while a so-called adaptation may appear to be closer to the category of interlingual translation. In other words, an *a priori* scheme only informs us about the substance of expression in texts in translation/transposition, and not about the quality of the transposition content-wise.

Let us return to the specific question of intersemiotic translation and the potentiality I believe it represents. This allows us to consider the question of translation globally, the translation of texts, but of texts that can belong to different semiotic, or even, universal systems.

The question is particularly pertinent when one refers to syncretic texts and their multimedial translations. As mentioned above, TS has limited its interest to linguistic transposition of these texts. Dubbing and subtitling therefore are not intersemiotic, since the substance of the expression is the same in both source and target texts. But the texts should be dealt with for their sense effect which is the result of the set of different languages or, as Fabbri claims, “oggetti che possono essere nello stesso tempo parole, gesti, movimenti, sistemi di luce, stati di materia ecc.” (1998: 21). Floch uses the term “global enunciation” meaning that in syncretic texts there is a cumulative strategy involving all types of language, constituting a single form produced by a single competence. Thus in semiotics there is a strong conviction that in order to study the expression of a language (e.g. a natural language) in a text made up of several languages (as in the case of a syncretic text) that expression can in no way be separated from the signifying set in which it is situated. Thus an analysis of the translation of the linguistic part of a film (i.e. its dubbing or subtitling), requires intersemiotic analysis where intersemiotics refers to the relationship between various types of language in a particular text. Landowski (1983) states that every production of sense has intersemiotic foundations since pure linguistic activity does not exist without involving other systems of meaning.

There are very few examples of analysis of this type of translation in TS. The work by Cattryse (1997) analysing the problem of adaptation of a written text for the screen using the polysystemic model described by Even-Zohar and Toury is one example, another is the book *From one Medium to Another* (Soukup et. al. 1997).¹³ We could also mention the work of Nicola Dusi on the adaptation of written texts for the screen. In an analysis of the film transposition by Louis Malle of Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro* he identifies the figurative and thematic isotopes of the source text and analyses how these are realized in the target text.

Attraverso l'analisi delle procedure di spazializzazione abbiamo cercato di far emergere il ruolo fondamentale, nel comprendere i rapporti tra le diverse configurazioni testuali, giocato dall'aspetto figurale dei linguaggi. Il testo filmico pone il proprio livello figurativo e quello semi-simbolico in stretta relazione col testo letterario (1999: 197).

Conclusions

I hope to have shown how semiotics is present in TS, but how limited this presence is. I also hope to have been successful in suggesting what routes could be followed to bring the two disciplines closer. I believe that integration with the tools supplied by CS on one side, and semiotics on the other, is not only useful, but even essential. While CS has concentrated its analysis on text reception and how various factors, such as those related to ideology, in the target culture influence translation, semiotics could bring attention back to the texts themselves. Beyond the kind of semiotic view already present in TS I think that its articulated, refined model

of textual analysis should be adopted. The text's function, its sense effects, its ideological weighting etc. are inscribed in the texts themselves and it is there that we must look for them.

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¹ Although the paper provides an overview of international studies in Semiotics it will focus particularly on developments in Italy.

² Since semiotics is a discipline that concentrates on the formulation of methods and models for the analysis of texts, it is obvious that translation applies Semiotics and not vice versa.

³ Among the earlier works (before the Nineties) on translation with a semiotic approach we can mention those of Levy (1969) and Popovic (1975) that are still important today, even if rather neglected. For an exhaustive discussion see the Introduction to Gori 1994.

⁴ Beside the essay of Wilss himself, the volume contains texts by de Beaugrande "Towards a Semiotic Theory of Literary Translating", Katharina Reiss "Zeichen oder Anzeichen? Probleme der AS-Textanalyse im Blick auf die Übersetzung", and Gideon Toury "Communication in Translated Texts. A Semiotic Approach".

⁵ See also Stecconi's articles on Peirce and translation (1994).

⁶ The term trasduction indicates that special kind of translation that takes place between different sign systems.

⁷ Eco has translated several texts into Italian, such as Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style* (1976) and *Sylvie* by Nerval (1998). Eco has analysed the latter text on different occasions the result now being a new translation by him.

⁸ This is the case of Eco author of novels of course, whose books have been translated into numerous languages. The translations of his novels have also been analysed, together with those of Magris, in a conference in Trieste (1989).

⁹ Gideon Toury is the author of one of the corrections of Jakobson's scheme (1986), and as we will see later, Eco has also proposed one.

¹⁰ An exception to this tendency is the Tel Aviv school with its leading names Toury and Even-Zohar. But they probably owe more to Russian formalists like Tynjanov and Rejzenbaum, rather than to Lotman.

¹¹ (((The translation of the quotations of Lotman in English are taken from the Italian versions.))) A **SECONDA DI QUELLO CHE SCEGLIETE!** [suggerisco l'uso della versione italiana dato che la versione inglese è una traduzione di una traduzione (presumo) - Chris]

¹² I refer here to work by Eco which is due to be published shortly.

¹³ Neither has the problem been very widely discussed in semiotics, although a second cycle of seminars supervised by Eco is being held at the University of Bologna on intersemiotic translation. The seminars are attended by semioticians from the two main schools of thought described above. Theoretical models and concrete analyses of many types of translation are presented there. Although exchange of ideas and theories is still at the experimental stage and as yet nothing has been published, reference to this activity appears nonetheless useful since it reveals the emergence of new interest on the part of semioticians for translation in general.

¹⁴ For space reasons the bibliography is reduced to a minimum, please consult the general bibliography in this number. **Controllare se va bene questa nota!**